

# The Man Beneath the Mask

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Category: Star Wars

Genre: Family, Hurt-Comfort

Language: English

Characters: Finn

Status: Completed

Published: 2016-04-10 08:06:24

Updated: 2016-04-10 08:06:24

Packaged: 2016-04-27 20:41:38

Rating: K+

Chapters: 1

Words: 1,094

Publisher: [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

Summary: A short look at the man who became Finn. One shot for "The Force Awakens."

## The Man Beneath the Mask

He thinks he was called something different once. He thinks he remembers warmth, light, and a woman's voice, singing softly. And perhaps, there was a smile in the eyes that looked at him. He wishes he could remember that other name. Maybe then his life, the rows of sameness, the ascetic beds, the spotless white armor, the blaster in his hands, maybe it would all make sense.

It was dark. He thinks he would have been afraid if he hadn't been used to it. He remembered being locked in a pod, all alone. He couldn't see, he couldn't hear, he would have gone mad were it not for the thick white pills, one a day, that made the world fuzzy and made him forget that he had ever wanted more than this.

This was better. At least now, he did not have to sleep alone. The bunks were spaced exactly two feet apart. Each one with a locker beside and the white uniform gleaming inside it. His pillow was one inch thick and his blanket was much thinner but he would never complain about being here. It was beautiful, wonderful, to fall asleep to the sounds of gentle breathing, to know that he was no longer alone in the dark.

God, he hated that uniform. It took hours to polish it to perfection. One speck on its surface and he would have to begin again. But worse still was the anonymity. FN-2160 loved music. Sometimes he would hum quietly to put himself to sleep. He loved being on sanitation duty with FN-2213. He had been older when became a storm trooper. He still remembered stories. And what he no longer remembered, he would create. FN-2167 loved to learn new things. He would return from missions with information, like the favorite food of the Detl'antaeans, eels, and the word for cabbage in Gaboovendi.

But his favorite was FN-2188 in the bed beside him. Because sometimes the pills weren't strong enough to drown out his loneliness and fear and when that happened, he could reach out into the darkness and feel the hand of his friend, no, his brother, clasping him tight.

But under the mask, those differences disappeared. Nobody was real. Nobody was anybody but what the First Order had made them.

He didn't want to go down to Jakku. Sure, he had never been on a desert planet before and there would be so many things to see, but they were armed for a bloodbath. So far, he had managed not to kill anyone. He was worried that it was inevitable. How much longer could he avoid taking a life before they would decide he was defective and reprogram him? He had no choice but to line up and march into the ship, FN-2186 in front and FN-2188 behind.

It was chaos. He'd known it would be. He could hear the sounds of blasters and only the filters in his helmet kept him from choking on dust.

And then it happened, the moment that changed his entire future. FN-2188 darted in front of him and then rocked backward, wavering momentarily before falling to the ground.

And he didn't know what to do. He had been trained to kill not to heal and no one would ever waste medical supplies in a storm trooper. They were barely even men at all in the Order's eyes.

It was so strange to see the storm trooper white taken over by red. He couldn't think. It would be so hard to polish it away. It was everywhere, dripping into the dusty ground. He dropped to his knees, hands touching, heart racing.

But FN-2188 knew he was lost already. He looked up at his friend, placed his hand on his helmet and whispered one word with his last breath, "brother."

It echoed in his fuzzy head. It echoed when he raised his gun and couldn't pull the trigger. And louder when they finished their job and went back to their places in their transport. He felt the empty spot behind like a festering hole.

"Brother," he heard again, shouting so loud it echoed in his bloodstained helmet. He had to take it off, had to take it off so he could breathe.

And again, "brother" he heard as he tried hard to fake the same detachment he had perfected over the years.

It was the voice that spurred him on as he released the pilot, Poe Dameron, the man who named him Finn. And it stayed with him through the adventures that followed. It quieted a little when he had people to stand beside him, when he found Rey, and when they ran into Han Solo and Chewie, and then when he found Poe again. He had never had so many people in his life that he could admit that he loved.

But by the time he awoke in the medical facility, the battle over, Rey off in search of her father, it was shouting in his ears. Because now he had time to remember what he lost.

And so he left the base and walked into the wilderness. There was a bag over his shoulder and in it, one white helmet. Poe's eyes had been burning with curiosity when he brought the helmet to him but he did not ask and Finn did not tell him.

Finn walked until he found silence, nothing but the sound of birds and the bubbling of a nearby stream. And he set the helmet on the ground and sat cross legged before it.

"Thank you," he said. "You were my friend always, even before you saved my life. And losing you gave me the strength to become a hero. Because of you I'm out, I'm free, and I have a name. I will not forget you. And so I name you, FN-2188. I name you friend and brother, hero and savior. I name you after the bravest man I've ever known. I name you Han."

And Finn stood. He looked around him until he saw a sturdy branch. He drove it into the ground and shored it up with rocks. And when he was done it would not fall over, he carefully placed the storm trooper helmet on the branch.

He turned to return to the resistance and the fight he believed in. And as he walked away, he shed a single tear. "Sleep safe, my brother."

End  
file.